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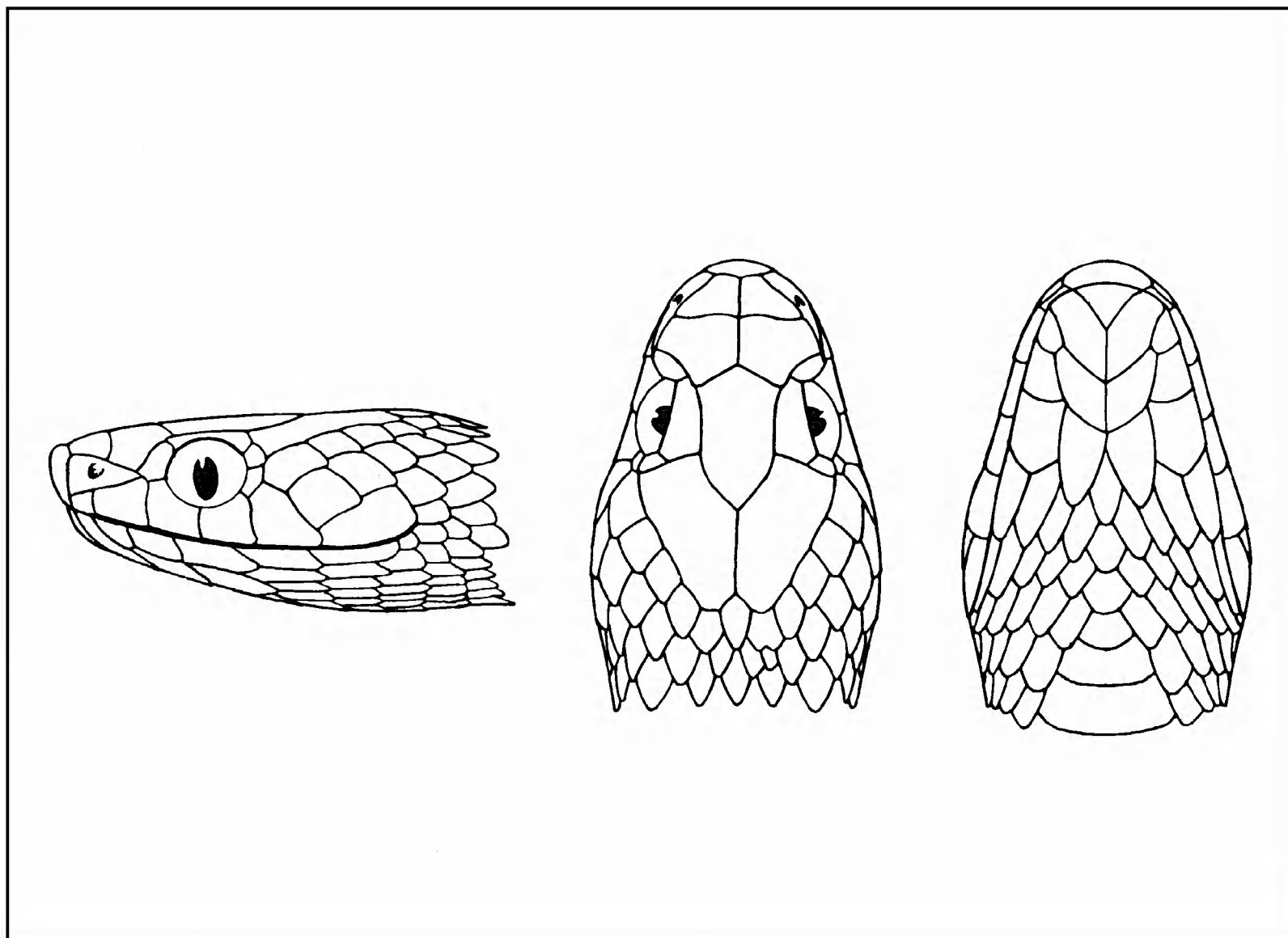
# Chicago Herpetological Society

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Volume 47, Number 12  
December 2012



# BULLETIN OF THE CHICAGO HERPETOLOGICAL SOCIETY

## Volume 47, Number 12

### December 2012

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**Cover:** Curl snake or myall, *Suta suta*. Drawing from *The Reptiles and Amphibians of South Australia* by Edgar R. Waite, 1929.

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## **Notes on Mexican Herpetofauna 18: Herpetofauna of Cerro El Topo Chico Natural Protected Area, Nuevo León, Mexico**

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### **Abstract**

Cerro El Topo Chico is a protected Natural area at a state level. This Cerro is located within the Metropolitan Area of Monterrey in the municipalities of Monterrey and Escobedo. It is completely surrounded by city, now considered an artificial island. This is the first study herpetofauna in the area based on sampling and distribution maps. A recent forest fire severely affected much of the Cerro El Topo Chico, and a herpetological study was conducted to determine the status of populations. A total of 66 species are distributed in the general area: 16 amphibians and 50 reptiles. Five are endemic to Mexico and 20 are under a category of protection. It is important to continue with sampling subsequent to the forest fire in the area. Human impacts on the ecology of this artificial island can be expected to diminish genetic diversity and lead to extirpation of some species.

### **Resumen**

El Cerro El Topo Chico, es un Área Natural Protegida a nivel estatal. Este cerro se ubica dentro del Area Metropolitana Area de Monterrey en los municipios de Monterrey y Escobedo. Se encuentra completamente rodeado por ciudad considerándose una isla artificial. Este es el primer estudio herpetofaunístico en el área en base a muestreos y mapas de distribución. Recientemente ocurrió un incendio que consumió casi en su totalidad el cerro, es por esto que realizar un estudio herpetológico es de importancia para determinar el estado de las poblaciones. Se reportaron 66 especies, repartidas en 16 anfibios y 50 reptiles. 5 son endémicas a México y 20 se encuentran bajo una categoría. Es de importancia continuar con los muestreos ya que el incendio sucedido, los impactos causados por el hombre y la condición de isla en que se encuentra es posible que las especies se encuentren en vías de extinguirse o una disminución de su pool genético.

### **Introduction**

The Sierra Madre Oriental is a chain of mountains running north-south throughout eastern Mexico. This mountainous system occupies an area of 160,220.4 km<sup>2</sup>, which is equivalent to about 8.2% of the country's territory, and varies in elevation from 200 to 3600 m (Luna et al., 2004). Several regionalization systems of Mexico, based on both physical and biotic criteria, show the Sierra Madre Oriental to have unique geographical and biological diversity (Lazcano et al., 2009). Canseco-Márquez et al.(2004) reported 207 species of amphibians and reptiles for the Sierra Madre Oriental: 44 frogs, 20 salamanders, 49 lizards, 88 snakes and 6 turtles.

Cerro El Topo Chico, part of the Sierra Madre Oriental, is located in the center of the state of Nuevo Leon. It has a total surface area of 1093.30 ha (10.933 km<sup>2</sup>), with a width of 2 km. It is a Protected Natural Area (ANP) at the state level (Anonymous, 2000). It can be viewed as a representative and emblematic symbol of the *regiomontano* landscape and an ecologically important zone that provides a diversity of environmental services and forms a refuge for the wildlife of our state (Anonymous, 2000). It is vital to intensely study this area.

No research on the amphibians and reptiles of Cerro El Topo Chico has been previously conducted and this is the first documentation on herpetofauna for this important State Protected Natural Area. Herpetologists who have worked very close to the site, now located within the Metropolitan Area of Monterrey, are: Martín del Campo (1953), Aseff-Martínez (1967), Velasco (1970), Contreras-Balderas et al.(1995), Lazcano et al.(2010); information and data have also been presented by Benavides-Ruiz (1987) for the municipality of Santiago; Banda-Leal (2002) and Lazcano et al.(2006) for Chipinque Ecological Park; and Gallardo-Valdez (2006) and Lazcano et al. (2009) for La Silla (Saddleback Mountain).

As a result of poor urban planning Cerro El Topo Chico is completely surrounded by the Metropolitan Area of Monterrey. Some urban development has encroached on the slopes. In addition, this *cerro* and the nearby Cerro las Mitras in the past have been exploited by the mining of construction material (limestone). This resulted in extreme erosion of some of the slopes. Mining had to be stopped because of flooding after strong hurricanes hit the city. Currently there is a minimum of industrial exploitation going on. Fortunately for the herpetofauna, the threat of flooding has stopped urban and industrial





A satellite view of Cerro El Topo Chico and the Monterrey Metropolitan Area. Source Google Earth 2012.

growth. However, urbanization has trapped the wildlife living here.

A recent threat was the fire that took place on the days of 25–28 April 2011, consuming 120 ha (nearly 11% of Cerro El Topo Chico), mainly microphyll scrub. It was a typical surface fire (Juan Carlos Pouda, pers. com.) strongly affecting flora and fauna. The response of amphibians and reptiles to anthropogenic disturbance to their microhabitats is scarcely studied and while most of the ecological relationships among these organisms are unknown, it is important to generate basic information about these communities to design management strategies (Osorno-

Muñoz, 1999).

It is crucial to assess the present herpetofauna for this important ANP Cerro El Topo Chico along elevation and vegetation zones. This will allow us to determine the current state of this *cerro*, which has been heavily impacted by human activities and isolated by population growth. It has become an artificial island and surely genetic variability and species are being lost.

### Study site

The ANP Cerro El Topo Chico, is near the center of the state of Nuevo León. Politically it is part of the municipalities of Monterrey and General Escobedo. (INEGI, 1986); geographically it is located between 25°44'35" and 25°48'08" N latitude, and between 100°19' and 100°22'21" W longitude with elevation from 600 to 1170 m. It is located in the Sierra Madre Oriental.

Cerro El Topo Chico harbors a variety of vegetation types, mainly represented by submontane shrubs and microphyll. The representative elements of the vegetation in the natural area are: barreta (*Helietta parvifolia*), coyotillo (*Karwinskia humboldtiana*), hieba del potro (*Caesalpinia mexicana*), tenzon (*Pithecellobium pallens*), anacahuíta (*Cordia boisieri*) and lechuguilla (*Agave lecheguilla*) (Anonymous, 2000).

According to the Köppen climate classification, modified by García (1981), the entire State Protected Natural Area is included in dry climate. This type of climate is characterized by evaporation exceeding precipitation; rains occurring in the summer



Cerro El Topo Chico in the distance, as seen from Escobedo, Nuevo León, Mexico. Photograph by Manuel Nevárez de los Reyes.



and scarce in the rest of the year. The total annual rainfall ranges between 300 and 500 mm, and the average annual temperature fluctuates between 18 and 22°C.

Field trips were conducted during the months of March, April, and July 2009–2011. We also reviewed the existing material in the preserved collection of the Laboratory of Herpetology of the Faculty of Biological Sciences/UANL and the distribution maps of species for their possible presence in Cerro El Topo Chico.

Individuals were captured and identified, and the following data were recorded: sex, date, time of observation, altitude, plant community, activity, substrate, geo-reference and the condition of the day.

Specimens were identified using the criteria of Smith and Taylor (1945, 1948, 1950), Conant and Collins (1998), Lazcano et al. (2010), Lemos-Espinal and Smith (2007) and the common and scientific names as updated by Liner and Casas-Andreu (2008).

## Results

Seven species were recorded during the field trips to Cerro El Topo Chico. No additional material collected in the study area was found in the scientific preserved collection of the Laboratory of Herpetology of the Faculty of Biological Sciences/UANL. The latest information on the species occurring in the state of Nuevo León and distribution maps indicate the possible presence of 16 species of amphibians and 50 species of reptiles, which would be equivalent to the 49.62% of herpetofauna present in the state (Table 1).

Of the species listed in Table 1, three are exotic and five are endemic to Mexico. Twenty of the species have protected status under NOM-059-SEMARNAT-2010: eight as species of special concern and 12 as threatened species (SEMARNAT, 2010).

## Discussion

Our research provides the first documentation of the herpetofauna on Cerro El Topo Chico. The list of 66 species in Table 1 was based on our sampling and on the distribution maps of Conant and Collins (1998), Lazcano et al. (2010), Lemos-Espinal and Smith (2007), López et al. (2009) and Elliott et al. (2009).

Many of the species of amphibians and reptiles listed in Table 1 have been documented for the Chipinque Ecological Park by Banda-Leal (2002) and Lazcano et al. (2006: 47 species); for the Cerro de la Silla (Saddleback Mountain) by Gallardo-Valdez (2006: 46 species) and Lazcano et al. (2009: 46 species); for the Sierra de Picachos by Contreras-Lozano et al. (2007: 47 species); for the Sierra San Antonio Peña Nevada by Lazcano et al. (2004: 32 species); and for Cerro El Potosí by Contreras-Lozano et al. (2010: 24 species).

With the fire that happened on 25–28 April 2011 it is possible that many of the species have suffered a decline in their populations. Fires create a mosaic of diverse wildlife habitat conditions, since they alter biotic and abiotic features of habitat (Cruz-Sáenz, 2008), resulting in sites with high species richness and others with very low diversity (Shipman et al., 2004). It is known that the main causes of extinction of amphibians and reptiles come from loss of habitat, changes in weather patterns, the introduction of exotic species and environmental pollution (Young et al., 2001). When optimum conditions are modified by the fragmentation of the forest, and is high intensity long-lasting disturbances to microhabitats occur, this can endanger amphibians that possess low ability of adaptation and dispersal (Blaustein and Wake, 1995; Pough, 1999; Rueda-Almonacid, 1999).

For species highly dependent on water such as amphibians and some reptiles, the effects of forest fires may be particularly severe, since after a fire the soils have reduced water storage capacity (due to the repellent layers that develop). Also compaction and erosion may occur and cause fluctuating surface temperatures (Kozłowski et al., 1991).

## Acknowledgment

Ing. Juan Carlos Pouda Romo, Jefe del Departamento de Incendios Forestales.- CONAFOR for offering information on the forest fire history of the site.



A milksnake, *Lampropeltis triangulum*, from Cerro El Topo Chico. Photograph by Javier Banda-Leal.



Another inhabitant of Cerro El Topo Chico, a patch-nosed snake, *Salvadora grahamiae*. Photograph by Javier Banda-Leal.



**Table 1.** Possible species for Cerro El Topo Chico, Nuevo León, México, based on latest information and distribution maps († indicates species observed). Status codes: Pr = protected (special concern), A = threatened, SE = without status, NE = not endemic, EN = endemic, EX = exotic.

| Taxon                                                         | Common Name                  | Status |
|---------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------|--------|
| <b>Amphibia: Anura</b>                                        |                              |        |
| <b>Family Bufonidae</b>                                       |                              |        |
| <i>Anaxyrus cognatus</i> (Say, in James, 1813)                | Great Plains Toad            | SE, NE |
| <i>Anaxyrus debilis</i> (Girard, 1854)                        | Green Toad                   | Pr, NE |
| <i>Anaxyrus punctatus</i> (Baird & Girard, 1851)              | Red-spotted Toad             | SE, NE |
| <i>Anaxyrus speciosus</i> (Girard, 1854)                      | Texas Toad                   | SE, NE |
| <i>Incilius nebulifer</i> (Girard, 1854)                      | Common Toad                  | SE, NE |
| <i>Rhinella marina</i> (Linnaeus, 1758)                       | Cane Toad                    | SE, EX |
| <b>Family Craugastoridae</b>                                  |                              |        |
| <i>Craugastor augusti</i> (Dugès, in Brocchi, 1879)           | Barking Frog                 | SE, NE |
| <b>Family Leptodactylidae</b>                                 |                              |        |
| <i>Leptodactylus fragilis</i> (Brocchi, 1877)                 | White-lipped Frog            | SE, NE |
| <b>Family Eleutherodactylidae</b>                             |                              |        |
| <i>Eleutherodactylus cystignathoides</i> (Cope,1877 [1878]) † | Rio Grande Chirping Frog     | SE, NE |
| <i>Eleutherodactylus longipes</i> (Baird, in Emory, 1869)     | Long-footed Chirping Frog    | SE, NE |
| <b>Family Hylidae</b>                                         |                              |        |
| <i>Smilisca baudinii</i> (Duméril & Bibron, 1841)             | Mexican Treefrog             | SE, NE |
| <b>Family Microhylidae</b>                                    |                              |        |
| <i>Gastrophryne olivacea</i> (Hallowell, 1857(1856)           | Western Narrow-mouthed Toad  | SE, NE |
| <b>Family Ranidae</b>                                         |                              |        |
| <i>Lithobates berlandieri</i> (Baird, 1854)                   | Rio Grande Leopard Frog      | Pr, NE |
| <b>Family Rhinophrynidae</b>                                  |                              |        |
| <i>Rhinophrynus dorsalis</i> A.M.C. Duméril & Bibron, 1841    | Mexican Burrowing Toad       | Pr, NE |
| <b>Family Scaphiopodidae</b>                                  |                              |        |
| <i>Scaphiopus couchii</i> Baird, 1854                         | Couch’s Spadefoot            | SE, NE |
| <i>Spea multiplicata</i> (Cope, 1863)                         | Western Spadefoot            | SE, NE |
| <b>Reptilia: Testudines</b>                                   |                              |        |
| <b>Family Testudinidae</b>                                    |                              |        |
| <i>Gopherus berlandieri</i> (Agassiz, 1857) †                 | Texas Tortoise               | A, NE  |
| <b>Reptilia: Squamata—Lizards</b>                             |                              |        |
| <b>Family Crotaphytidae</b>                                   |                              |        |
| <i>Crotaphytus collaris</i> (Say, 1813)                       | Eastern Collared Lizard      | A, NE  |
| <b>Family Eublepharidae</b>                                   |                              |        |
| <i>Coleonyx brevis</i> Stejneger, 1893                        | Texas Banded Gecko           | Pr, NE |
| <b>Family Gekkonidae</b>                                      |                              |        |
| <i>Hemidactylus turcicus</i> (Linnaeus, 1758) †               | Mediterranean House Gecko    | SE, EX |
| <b>Family Phrynosomatidae</b>                                 |                              |        |
| <i>Cophosaurus texanus</i> Troschel, 1852(1850)               | Greater Earless Lizard       | A, NE  |
| <i>Phrynosoma cornutum</i> (Harlan, 1824 [1825])              | Texas Horned Lizard          | SE, NE |
| <i>Phrynosoma modestum</i> Girard, 1852                       | Round-tailed Horned Lizard   | SE, NE |
| <i>Sceloporus consobrinus</i> Baird & Girard, 1853            | Prairie Lizard               | SE, NE |
| <i>Sceloporus couchii</i> Baird, 1859(1858)                   | Couch’s Spiny Lizard         | SE, EN |
| <i>Sceloporus grammicus</i> Wiegmann, 1828                    | Graphic Spiny Lizard         | Pr, NE |
| <i>Sceloporus marmoratus</i> Hallowell, 1852                  | Northern Rose-bellied Lizard | SE, NE |
| <i>Sceloporus olivaceus</i> H. M. Smith, 1934                 | Texas Spiny Lizard           | SE, NE |
| <i>Sceloporus ornatus</i> Baird, 1859 (1858)                  | Ornate Spiny Lizard          | A, EN  |



Table 1 (cont'd).

| Taxon                                                                      | Common Name                     | Status |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------|--------|
| <i>Sceloporus parvus</i> H.M. Smith, 1934                                  | Blue-bellied Lizard             | SE, EN |
| <i>Sceloporus serrifer</i> Cope, 1866 †                                    | Rough-scaled Lizard             | SE, NE |
| <b>Family Scincidae</b>                                                    |                                 |        |
| <i>Plestiodon brevirostris</i> (Günter,1860)                               | Short-nosed Skink               | SE, NE |
| <i>Plestiodon tetragrammus</i> Baird, 1858                                 | Four-lined Skink                | SE, NE |
| <b>Family Teiidae</b>                                                      |                                 |        |
| <i>Aspidoscelis scalaris</i> (Cope,1892)                                   | Texas Spotted Whiptail          | SE, NE |
| <b>Reptilia: Squamata—Snakes</b>                                           |                                 |        |
| <b>Family Colubridae</b>                                                   |                                 |        |
| <i>Arizona elegans</i> Kennicott in Baird, 1859                            | Glossy Snake                    | SE, NE |
| <i>Bogertophis subocularis</i> (A.E.Brown,1901)                            | Southern Trans-Pecos Ratsnake   | SE, EN |
| <i>Coluber constrictor</i> Linnaeus, 1758                                  | North American Racer            | A, NE  |
| <i>Coluber flagellum</i> Shaw, 1802                                        | Coachwhip                       | A, NE  |
| <i>Coluber schotti</i> (Baird & Girard, 1853)                              | Schott’s Whipsnake              | SE, NE |
| <i>Coluber taeniatus</i> Hallowell,1852                                    | Striped Whipsnake               | SE, NE |
| <i>Diadophis punctatus</i> (Linnaeus, 1766)                                | Ring-necked Snake               | SE, NE |
| <i>Drymarchon melanurus</i> (A.M.C.Duméril, Bibron & A.H.A. Duméril, 1854) | Central American Indigo Snake   | SE, NE |
| <i>Ficimia streckeri</i> E.H. Taylor, 1931                                 | Tamaulipan Hook-nosed Snake     | SE, NE |
| <i>Gyalopion canum</i> Cope, 1861 (1860)                                   | Chihuahuan Hook-nosed Snake     | SE, NE |
| <i>Heterodon kennerlyi</i> Kennicott, 1860                                 | Mexican Hog-nosed Snake         | SE, NE |
| <i>Hypsiglena jani</i> (Dugès, 1865)                                       | Texas Nightsnake                | SE, NE |
| <i>Lampropeltis alterna</i> (A.E. Brown, 1901)                             | Gray-banded Kingsnake           | A, NE  |
| <i>Lampropeltis getula</i> (Linnaeus, 1766)                                | Common Kingsnake                | A, NE  |
| <i>Lampropeltis triangulum</i> (Lacépède, 1789) †                          | Milksnake                       | A, NE  |
| <i>Leptodeira septentrionalis</i> (Kennicott, in Baird, 1859)              | Northern Cat-eyed Snake         | SE, NE |
| <i>Opheodrys aestivus</i> (Linnaeus, 1766)                                 | Rough Greensnake                | SE, NE |
| <i>Pantherophis emoryi</i> (Baird & Girard, 1853)                          | Great Plains Ratsnake           | SE, NE |
| <i>Pituophis catenifer</i> (Blainville, 1835)                              | Gopher Snake                    | SE, NE |
| <i>Rhinocheilus lecontei</i> Baird & Girard, 1853                          | Long-nosed Snake                | SE, NE |
| <i>Salvadora grahamiae</i> Baird & Girard, 1853 †                          | Eastern Patch-nosed Snake       | SE, NE |
| <i>Sonora semiannulata</i> Baird & Girard, 1853                            | Western Groundsnake             | SE, NE |
| <i>Storeria dekayi</i> (Holbrook,1836)                                     | Texas Brownsnake                | SE, NE |
| <i>Tantilla atriceps</i> (Günther, 1895 in Salvin & Godman, 1885-1902) †   | Mexican Black-headed Snake      | A, NE  |
| <i>Thamnophis marcianus</i> (Baird & Girard, 1853)                         | Checkered Gartersnake           | A, NE  |
| <i>Thamnophis proximus</i> (Say, in James, 1823)                           | Arid Land Ribbonsnake           | A, NE  |
| <b>Family Elapidae</b>                                                     |                                 |        |
| <i>Micrurus tener</i> (Baird & Girard, 1853)                               | Texas Coralsnake                | SE, NE |
| <b>Family Leptotyphlopidae</b>                                             |                                 |        |
| <i>Rena dulcis</i> (Baird & Girard, 1853)                                  | Texas Threadsnake               | SE, NE |
| <i>Rena myopicus</i> (Garman, 1884[(1883)])                                | Tampico Threadsnake             | SE, EN |
| <b>Family Typhlopidae</b>                                                  |                                 |        |
| <i>Ramphotyphlops braminus</i> (Daudin,1803)                               | Brahminy Blindsnake             | SE, EX |
| <b>Family Crotalidae</b>                                                   |                                 |        |
| <i>Crotalus atrox</i> Baird & Girard, 1853                                 | Western Diamondback Rattlesnake | Pr, NE |
| <i>Crotalus lepidus</i> (Kennicott, 1861)                                  | Rock Rattlesnake                | Pr, NE |
| <i>Crotalus molossus</i> Baird & Girard, 1853                              | Black-tailed Rattlesnake        | Pr, NE |



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## What You Missed at the November Meeting

John Archer  
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November meetings are not as well attended as others, but we continue to have really good speakers, so I'm confused as to why. The elections usually go quickly and are in themselves an important part of your society, so why not attend? We still have a raffle with some really valuable prizes; you still can mix with others of a like mind; you still have an opportunity of seeing and interacting with some really interesting animals; you still have the pleasure of hearing terrific presentations.

For those of you who have kids, your society has started a Jr. Herp Society just for them. There are crafts, animals, and speakers just for kids with the targeted ages being 8–12, but nearly any age welcome. Meetings will be held at the Peggy Notebaert Nature Museum from noon to 1 P.M. on Sunday of the first full weekend of each month. This coincides with the weekend we have animals on display at the museum. We will usually meet in the Notebaert's education room on the second floor. Admission to the museum is waived for participants, but only to attend the Jr. Herp meeting, not to wander the museum. If you have kids who are interested in your hobby, this is the place to take them.

When I arrived at the November meeting, I approached a person I had never met but from photos I was pretty sure was Julie tenBensel. I liked her immediately when I asked if she had a PowerPoint I could copy. She looked at me and said, "I don't do PowerPoint." No, Julie doesn't do PowerPoint. She just brings animals. A half-dozen or so cages, all nicely decorated, and a large wired enclosure held the subjects of her talk. She was going to speak about the care and feeding of monitors (*Varanus* spp.) and her visual aids were alive and moving. The time and energy she put in to bringing those animals to our meeting demonstrated not only her desire to deliver a first rate presentation but also her appreciation of the lizards, all of which



Julie tenBensel enthralled by a rare "type 2" albino water monitor (*Varanus salvator*). Photograph by Erika N. Chen-Walsh.

she treated with care and obvious affection. During our short conversation prior to the meeting she expressed her doubts about the quality of her upcoming performance because she had put it together rather hastily. She needn't have worried. In spite of occasionally having to interrupt her speaking to return an errant argus monitor (*Varanus panoptes*) to its enclosure, she delivered an informative and delightful presentation.

Autobiographically speaking, Julie proclaims a lifelong fondness for animals and a yearning to be a zoologist, but circumstances led her to the corporate world for a living. She's raised and sold chameleons and even started a clothing line, but now concentrates on monitors. She began with a short explanation of monitor evolution, mentioning the largest discovered so far, the extinct megalania (*V. priscus*). Monitors range from Africa through the Middle East, India, Asia, Indonesia, and down to Australia, with African species tending to be larger and Indonesia and Australia having a wider variety of species. General body plan of a monitor is a long slender body with a thin neck and robust legs tipped with strong claws. Julie offered to show us her scars as proof of their powerful claws. Ground-dwelling species tend to have strong semi-prehensile tails while the arboreal species have very prehensile tails. All have good eyesight, excellent smell and poor hearing, and all are good climbers and swimmers. Most exhibit bipedalism on occasion, standing on back legs to survey the terrain, and able to run short distances in that upright attitude. They tend to be diurnal and highly active with large home ranges. A study of white-throated monitors (*V. albigularis*) has demonstrated an ability to recognize numbers up to six, and all keepers and students of these animals will testify to their high intelligence.

In captivity monitors thrive on variety and space, with the



Two of Julie's argus monitors (*Varanus panoptes*) enjoying each other's company. Photograph by Julie tenBensel.



We saw one of these emerald tree monitors (*Varanus prasinus*) at the meeting. Photograph by Julie tenBensel.





An argus monitor looking engaged and intelligent as do most monitors. Photograph by Julie tenBensel.

larger species needing at least an 8' × 8' × 8' cage. Babies do better in smaller cages. All will use climbable features, and all enjoy burrowing, confining hides, and ambient temperatures from 80 to 100°F with hot spots of 100–130°F. Julie uses lots of platforms and UVB lights for all her animals, especially the arboreal species and babies. She feeds a variety of foods, with raw chicken and turkey as the staple being supplemented with whole fish, hard-boiled eggs, the occasional mouse, and even turkey dogs. All monitors available in the pet trade are carnivores, though some of the smaller species occasionally eat fruit. Babies of the smaller species start out on insects. She feeds every day in the summer, but stresses that it is easy to overfeed, especially the savannah monitors (*V. exanthematicus*) that seem to have slower metabolisms than their kin. The animals are very messy eaters. Julie stressed that monitors are not good first-time pets. They are usually difficult to handle and expensive to keep.

Then she brought out her visual aids, answering questions and telling anecdotes. Your president Jason Hood, who had been busily returning the two argus monitors to their cage every time they attempted to explore outside the confines of their pen, glanced pensively at his hands when Julie mentioned that argus monitors can rip a person's hand off. Jason retained all of his appendages. All the animals that Julie brought seemed docile, though she used gloves with some. In addition to the argus monitors, she brought out a gorgeous little black-and-white Timor monitor (*V. timorensis*) followed by an emerald tree monitor (*V. prasinus*) displaying bright-green coloring set off by a reddish-striped back. Along with mentioning hand-destroying capabilities, Julie included snippets of facts of all the animals, mentioning that crocodile monitors (*V. salvadorii*) are notoriously aggressive and can grow longer than Komodo dragons (*V. komodoensis*), which are considerably milder in temperament.



This baby water monitor (*Varanus salvator*) may grow from a handful to become 8 or 9 feet long. Photograph by Julie tenBensel.

She answered questions about her specific husbandry and included other ways of keeping monitors. She told of leaping to her feet and rushing to her animal room a few times before she realized that when her monitors elected to vacate the multi-level platforms in their cages, they almost always simply jumped, landing with a huge thud and shaking the house. She stressed the advantages of captive-bred animals, and emphasized the need to carefully check out claims of captive-bred for many of the species. While she warned that monitors are not pets for beginners, she did say that ackies (*V. acanthurus*) or Timors are reasonable starter monitors. She was asked what her dream monitor would be, and without hesitation she replied, “perentie.”

So at November's meeting we elected another fine board for your society, got to try for some terrific prizes in the raffle, mingled with people we may only see once a month, and were able to get close and personal with animals that are beautiful, intelligent and fascinating. And we listened to a knowledgeable speaker who shared her insights into monitor care and habits while quite obviously displaying her real affection for this genus. And you're missing all that?



## Herpetology 2012

In this column the editorial staff presents short abstracts of herpetological articles we have found of interest. This is not an attempt to summarize all of the research papers being published; it is an attempt to increase the reader's awareness of what herpetologists have been doing and publishing. The editor assumes full responsibility for any errors or misleading statements.

### NEW RATTLESNAKE SPECIES

C. G. Anderson and E. Greenbaum [2012, Herpetological Monographs 26:19-57] note that the black-tailed rattlesnake (*Crotalus molossus*) is a wide-ranging species complex with representatives from the southwestern United States through the highlands of central and southern Mexico. The systematics of this group has received little attention and in the past six decades only two taxonomic changes have been proposed (the transfer of *C. basiliscus oaxacus* to *C. molossus* and the elevation of *C. m. estebanensis* to full species). However, a recent revision of the Neotropical rattlesnakes (*C. durissus* and *C. simus*) recovered a polyphyletic *C. molossus*. The authors sequenced data from three mitochondrial genes (ATPases 8 and 6, cyt b, and ND4) and three nuclear genes (c-mos, EXPH5, and RAG1) to examine phylogenetic relationships among *C. molossus* lineages and the closely related species *C. basiliscus* and *C. totonacus*. Results recovered strong support for two deeply divergent northern *C. molossus* lineages that are morphologically distinct. Biogeographical patterns and divergence dates inferred from mitochondrial data suggest the diversification of *C. molossus* is the result of a Neogene vicariance event associated with uplift of the Sierra Madre Occidental. Population-level analyses suggest that major lineages of *C. molossus* have been stable since their initial divergence. On the basis of morphological and molecular evidence the authors resurrect the name *Crotalus ornatus* Hallowell, 1854, for black-tailed rattlesnake populations in the Chihuahuan Desert and central Texas.

### LONG-TERM TWIN-SPOTTED RATTLESNAKE STUDY

D. B. Prival and M. J. Schroff [2012, Herpetological Monographs 26:1-18] conducted a 13-yr study of *Crotalus pricei* in Arizona's Chiricahua Mountains, capturing 306 individual snakes and recapturing snakes on 155 occasions. Juveniles shed and fed more frequently and grew more quickly than adults. Spiny lizard (*Sceloporus*) scales were found in 78% of fecal samples, making *Sceloporus* the most common prey item for both juveniles and adults. Males became larger than females at 5 yr of age, a year or two after females reached reproductive size. Although 45% of adult females were gravid, reproduction was not typically biennial and larger snakes were more likely to be gravid than smaller adult snakes. Survival rate (mean  $\pm$  SE) at the most-studied site was  $0.707 \pm 0.0334$  and detectability was  $0.309 \pm 0.0386$ ; detectability was positively correlated with number of search hours and negatively correlated with dry weather. Mean population size at this site was 67 snakes, and there was no evidence of a population decline over the course of the study. However, age class structure was skewed toward younger snakes at the site, probably due to illegal collection of snakes for the pet trade.

### PYGMY RATTLESNAKE GROWTH PATTERNS

P. G. May and T. M. Farrell [2012, Herpetological Monographs 26:58-79] studied growth in snout-vent length (SVL) and body mass of dusky pygmy rattlesnakes (*Sistrurus miliarius barbouri*) in Volusia County, Florida, with the use of mark-recapture techniques. Between February 1992 and December 2000, these authors PIT-tagged 665 individuals of approximately 1 yr of age or greater that were subsequently recaptured at least once. Because snakes can be definitively aged at 1 yr, this resulted in a large sample of snakes of known age that were followed for up to 7 yr. Seventy-five of these individuals PIT-tagged at 1 yr were identified from photographs of neonates born in captivity, allowing relation of adult growth to neonate traits. The data suggest that pygmy rattlesnakes in central Florida exhibit highly variable patterns of growth that are related to a mild climate that allows feeding and growth throughout the year, and to a fluctuating prey base that results in irregular growth patterns often unlike those predicted by typical growth equations such as the von Bertalanffy model. Snakes in the study populations were surface-active throughout the year, and snakes with detectable prey in the gut were found in all months. Growth is most rapid in the first year, but growth rates did not differ markedly from other viperids occurring in more temperate areas. In their first year, pygmy rattlesnakes in Florida increased their mass over birth on average more than fourfold, and increased SVL 1.8-fold. Growth in both mass and SVL continued throughout life, with no clear indication of an asymptote in size. Multiple regressions of SVL and body mass against age showed a slight but significant effect of sex on both SVL and mass, though these differences were not apparent until snakes were approximately 4 yr. Males and females showed no difference in SVL growth rates or patterns of change in growth rate with age, but females grew faster in body mass than males. Body-mass growth rates did not decline with age in either sex. Rates of increase in SVL in the first year of life differed significantly among years, though these differences were not correlated with estimates of prey (frog) abundance. However, neither body size at birth or first-year growth rates was significantly related to size at 1 yr of age or with growth rates later in life. Inspection of individual growth records and characterization of records into categories defined here showed great variability in patterns of growth, with episodic growth occurring in most individuals, including larger adults. A year-round activity season may decouple feeding and growth in these snakes from the temporal constraints imposed on more northern snakes, resulting in greater variability in individual growth trajectories. Prolonged feeding opportunities may allow snakes with below-average feeding conditions in their first year to compensate for slower initial growth by opportunistic feeding and rapid bouts of growth at any time later in life.



## Unofficial Minutes of the CHS Board Meeting, November 16, 2012

The meeting was called to order at 7:56 P.M. at the Schaumburg Public Library. Board members Lawrence Huddleston, Deb Krohn and Aaron LaForge were absent.

### Officers' Reports

Recording Secretary: The minutes of the October 19, 2012, board meeting were read and accepted.

Treasurer: The October financial report was presented, discussed and accepted.

Membership Secretary: Membership numbers are holding steady around 500. A list of newly expired memberships was read.

Sergeant-at-arms: Attendance at the October general meeting was 28.

### Committee Reports

Shows:

- Notebaert, first full weekend of each month. Josh Chernoff is coordinator.
- Great Lakes Pet Expo, Wisconsin Exposition Center, Milwaukee, February 2, 2013.
- Chicagoland Family Pet Expo, Arlington Park Racecourse, March 15–17, 2013.

### Old Business

Junior Herpers club: Background checks on volunteers have been completed. Jason will review them

### New Business

The board discussed what benefits the families of the junior herp club members can or should receive.

The December 14 board meeting will be a potluck at the home of the Malawys.

### Round Table

Mike Scott had a good time at SEWERfest.

Cindy has a new job at The Reptile Report Marketplace

Nancy Kloskowski also thought SEWERfest was nice.

Dick Buchholz is heading for Houston and will be gone for the November general meeting and the December Notebaert weekend.

Stephanie Capiello's turtles recently got new cages.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:16 P.M.

*Respectfully submitted by recording secretary Jenny Vollman*



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**RATS AND MICE**



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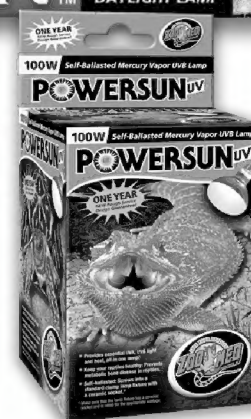
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## UPCOMING MEETINGS

The next meeting of the Chicago Herpetological Society will be held at 7:30 P.M., Wednesday, December 26, at the Peggy Notebaert Nature Museum, Cannon Drive and Fullerton Parkway, in Chicago. **This meeting will be a holiday party.** The CHS will provide soft drinks and snacks. If you would like to bring something edible to share with the group, you are invited to do so. If you would like to bring an animal to show off to the group, you are encouraged to do that as well. This will be a chance to socialize all evening and get to know your fellow members a little better.

**Ray Pawley** will speak at the January 30, 2013, meeting. Ray is a retired curator of reptiles at Brookfield Zoo, who now makes his home near Hondo, New Mexico. Ray's talk will cover "Brookfield Zoo Reptile House Techniques and Strategies That You Might Not Have Known About." This will be a report on techniques, methods and management protocols that Ray developed over the years at the Lincoln Park and Brookfield Zoos for captive herps.

The regular monthly meetings of the Chicago Herpetological Society take place at Chicago's newest museum—the **Peggy Notebaert Nature Museum**. This beautiful building is at Fullerton Parkway and Cannon Drive, directly across Fullerton from the Lincoln Park Zoo. Meetings are held the last Wednesday of each month, from 7:30 P.M. through 9:30 P.M. Parking is free on Cannon Drive. A plethora of CTA buses stop nearby.

## Board of Directors Meeting

Are you interested in how the decisions are made that determine how the Chicago Herpetological Society runs? And would you like to have input into those decisions? If so, mark your calendar for the next board meeting, to be held at 7:30 P.M., January 18, 2013, in the adult meeting room on the second floor of the Schaumburg Township District Library, 130 S. Roselle Road, Schaumburg.

## The Chicago Turtle Club

The monthly meetings of the Chicago Turtle Club are informal; questions, children and animals are welcome. Meetings normally take place at the North Park Village Nature Center, 5801 N. Pulaski, in Chicago. Parking is free. For more info visit the group's Facebook page.

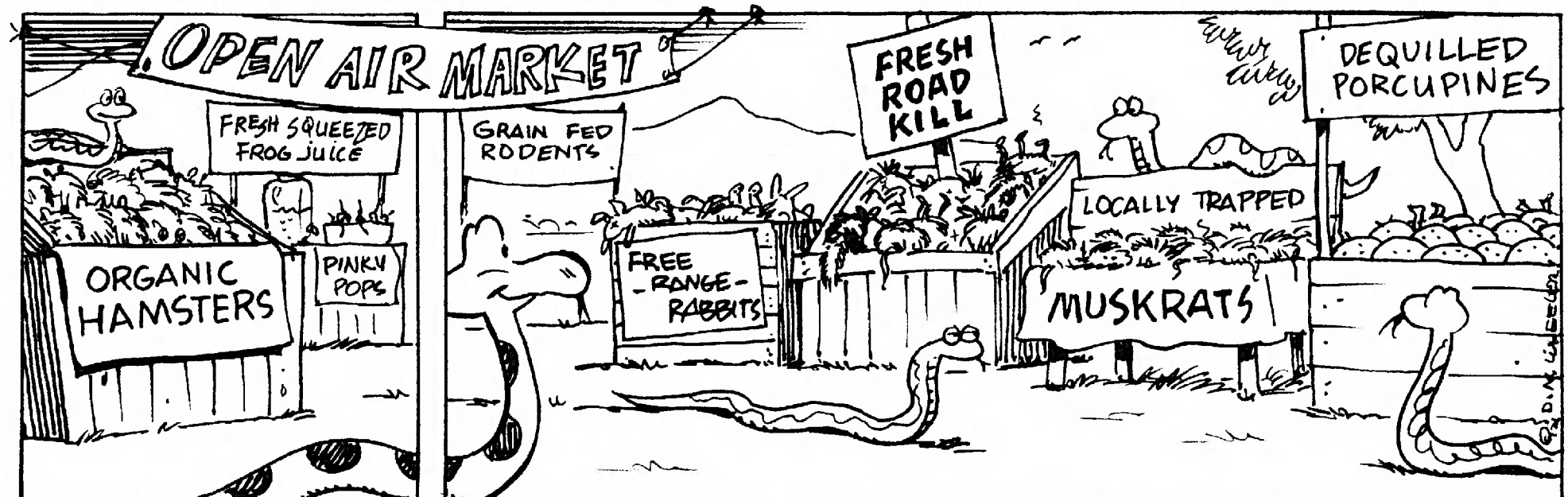
## ELECTION RESULTS

As a result of the elections held November 28, 2012, the following officers and members-at-large will serve on the CHS Board of Directors for the year 2013.

President: Jason Hood  
Vice-president: Cindy Rampacek  
Treasurer: Andy Malawy  
Recording Secretary: Jenny Vollman  
Corresponding Secretary: Stephanie Capiello  
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